Aqeeqah

The Act, the History, the Status, The Method and Some Injunctions

by

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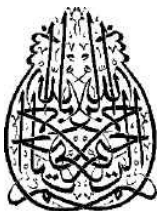
The dictionary meaning of Aqeeqah: "The word Aqeeqah (عقيقة) is derived from the root word "Aq" (عَقَّ), which has the following two meanings[1]:

1. Disobeying parents. Therefore, when it is said in Arabic that a person regards his son to be an "Aaq" (عَاق), he means that his son is disobedient to him.
2. To sacrifice an animal when a child is born.

The above two meanings of Aqeeqah have been mentioned because Rasulullaah ρ referred to both meanings in the following Hadith reported by Nasa'ee and Abu Dawood:

عن عمرو بن شعيب عن ابيه عن جده τ قال سئل رسول الله ρ عن العيقة فقال لا يحب الله العقوق كانه كره الاسم وقال من ولد له الولد فاحب ان ينسك عنه فالينسك عن الغلام شاتين وعن الجارية شاة

Hadhrat Amr bin Shu'ayb τ narrates from his father who narrates from his father that Rasulullaah ρ was once asked about Aqeeqah. Appearing to dislike the name, Rasulullaah ρ replied, "Allaah dislikes 'Uqooq' (عُقوق – disobedience to parents). Whoever has a child and wishes to sacrifice an animal should sacrifice two goats for a son and one goat for a daughter."[2]

Rasulullaah ρ had mentioned:

فضلت عن الانبياء بستٍّ : اعطيت جوامع الكلم (الي آخر الحديث)

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[1] *Misbaahul Lughat*, Sa'eed Co. Karachi.
[2] *Nasa'ee*, *Abu Dawood* as reported in *Mishkaatul Masabeeh* pg. 267.

"I have been honoured above the other Ambiyaa with six things. I have been granted concise speech…"[3]

This means that using only a few words, Rasulullaah ρ could speak volumes. Therefore, when someone asked about Aqeeqah, Rasulullaah ρ told him that it was a good thing to slaughter an animal when a child is born and also made it clear to him that he should avoid disobeying his parents because Allaah dislikes this.

The Reason for the Name "Aqeeqah"

Allaama Isma'ee رحمه الله has mentioned that original dictionary meaning of the word Aqeeqah is the hair that a newborn child is born with. This word is used for the act of sacrificing an animal because it usually takes place on the same day that this hair is shaved off.[4]

The Technical Meaning of Aqeeqah According to the Shari'ah

In the context of the Shari'ah, Aqeeqah refers to the animal slaughtered seven days after a child is born.[5]

The History of Aqeeqah, its Status and Method Before Islaam

The status and practice of Aqeeqah can be traced from several Ahadeeth of Rasulullaahρ. We will now quote two relevant Ahadeeth which provide adequate elucidation.

عن بريدة τ قال كنا في الجاهلية اذا ولد لاحدنا غلاماً نذبح شاة و نلطخ رأسه بدمها فلما جاء الاسلام كنا نذبح شاة يوم السابع ونحلق رأسه و نلطخه بزعفران

Hadhrat Buraydah τ says, "When a child was born to any of us during the period of ignorance, we would slaughter a goat and apply the blood to the head of the child. Thereafter, when Islaam came to us, we would slaughter a goat on the seventh day, shave the child's head and apply saffron to the head."[6]

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[3] Muslim from Hadhrat Abu Hurayra τ as reported in *Mishkaatul Masabeeh* (pg.512).
[4] *Sharhul Muhadhab* (Vol.8 Pg.428), as mentioned in *I'laa us Sunan* (Vol.17 Pg.99).
[5] *Mirqaat*, commentary of *Mishkaatul Masabeeh* (Vol.8 Pg.154).
[6] *Abu Dawood*, as quoted in *Mishkaatul Masabeeh* (Pg.363).

عن ابي هريرة τ قال قال رسول الله ρ ان اليهود تعق عن الغلام كبشاً ولا تعق عن الجارية فعقوا او اذبحوا عن الغلام كبشين و عن الجارية كبشاً

Hadhrat Abu Hurayra τ narrates that Rasulullaah ρ said, "Since the Jews slaughter one sheep when a boy is born and none when a girl is born, you (Muslims) should slaughter two sheep when a boy is born and one sheep when a daughter is born."[7]

The above Hadith makes it clear that even the Jews used to perform Aqeeqah. However, just as the corrupt mentality of the Jews is evident from so many of their activities, the same mentality is noticed in this affair of Aqeeqah as well. For this reason, when a boy was born to them, they slaughtered one goat. On the other hand, when a girl was born to them they regarded the birth to be something degrading. Consequently, they did not even bother to slaughter anything on this occasion.

Islaam opposed Judaism in every era, at the same time, it has always remolded man from sinking to the depths of mental depravity. For this reason, Rasulullaah ρ said, "the Jews slaughter one animal when a boy is born. You Muslims should therefore slaughter two animals. Because of their distress, the Jews do not slaughter any animal when a girl is born. Therefore, (out of happiness) you Muslims should slaughter an animal on this occasion."

Rasulullaah ρ also opposed the custom of their Arabs during the period of ignorance. For this reason, he taught Muslims to rather anoint they head of a newborn child with saffron rather than the blood of a slaughtered animal.

The Status and Shar'i Proof for Aqeeqah

Authentic Ahadeeth had already been mentioned concerning the history of Aqeeqah. Besides these, there are several more Ahadeeth which prove that the status of Aqeeqah in Islaam is none less than Sunnah Ghaiyr Mu'akkadah and Mustahab. Amongst these Ahadeeth are the following:

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[7] *Bazzaar*, as quoted in *Majma* (Vol.8 Pg.58) and *I'laa us Sunan* (Vol.17 Pg.101).

عن سلمان بن عامر الضبي τ قال سمعت رسول الله ρ يقول مع الغلام عقيقة فاهريقوا عنه دماً و اميطوا عنه الاني

Hadhrat Salmaan bin Aamir Dhabi τ narrates that he heard Rasulullaah ρ say, "There is Aqeeqah with a boy (the parents should perform Aqeeqah when a son is born to them). Slaughter an animal for a boy and (thereby) remove difficulties from him."[8]

عن ام كرز رضي الله عنها قالت سمعت رسول الله ρ يقول عن الغلام شاتان و عن الجارية شاة ولا يضركم ذكراناً او اناثاً

Hadhrat Umm Karz رضي الله عنها says that she heard Rasulullaah ρ say, "Two goats are slaughtered for a boy and one for a girl and it is irrelevant whether the animal is male or female."[9]

عن عمرو بن شعيب عن ابيه عن جده τ قال قال رسول الله ρ من احب ان ينسك عن ولده فالينسك عنه عن الغلام شاتين وعن الجارية شاة

Hadhrat Amr bin Shu'ayb narrates from his father who narrates from his father that Rasulullaah ρ once said, "Whoever has a child and wishes to sacrifice an animal should sacrifice two goats for a son and one goat for a daughter."[10]

عن الحسن عن سمرة بن جندب τ ان رسول الله ρ قال كل غلام رهينة بعقيقة تذبح عنه يوم السابع ويسمّي و يحلق رأسه

Hadhrat Samura bin Jundub τ narrates that Rasulullaah ρ said, "Every child is a pawn placed as security against the Aqeeqah which is to be performed for it on the seventh day when the name is also kept and the hair shaved off."[11]

All the above Ahadeeth mention the verbal statements of Rasulullaah ρ concerning Aqeeqah. We shall now cite some Ahadeeth that express the actions of Rasulullaah ρ.

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[8] *Bukhari* Vol. 2 Pg. 822.
[9] *Nasa'ee* Vol.2 Pg. 167.
[10] *Nasa'ee* Vol.2 Pg. 167.
[11] *Tirmidhi* Vol.1 Pg. 278.

عن ابن عباس τ ان رسول الله ρ عقّ عن الحسن و الحسين كبشين كبشين

Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Abbaas τ states that Rasulullaah ρ slaughtered two sheep on behalf of Hadhrat Hasan τ and two sheep on behalf of Hadhrat Husayn τ (his two grandsons)."[12]

عن علي بن ابي طالب τ قال عق رسول الله ρ عن الحسن بشاة و قال يا فاطمة احلقي رأسه و تصدقي بزنة شعره فضة فوزنته فكان وزنه درهماً او بعض درهم

Hadhrat Ali bin Abi Taalib τ narrates that Rasulullaah ρ performed Aqeeqah on behalf of Hadhrat Hasan τ and then instructed his daughter saying, "O Faatima! Shave his hair and give silver equivalent to the weight of the hair in charity." Hadhrat Ali τ states further that when they weighed the hair it, it equalled the weight of a Dirham or just less than a Dirham.[13]

The Purpose of Aqeeqah

The true purpose of Aqeeqah and its effect on the child is evident from the following Hadith of Mishkaatul Masabeeh:

قال رسول الله ρ الغلام مرتهن بعقيقته

Rasulullaah ρ said, "Every child is a pawn placed as security against its Aqeeqah."[14]

In *Mirqaat* which is the commentary of Mishkaatul Masabeeh, the explanation of this Hadith is given as follows:

"The meaning of the child being a pawn is that just as complete benefit cannot be derived from a pawned item until it is released by paying off the debt, complete benefit cannot be derived from the blessing of having a child until appropriate gratitude is not expressed. The appropriate gratitude in the case of a child is that which Rasulullaah ρ has demonstrated to us, namely the Aqeeqah. The Aqeeqah is

[12] *Nasa'ee* Vol.2 Pg. 167.
[13] *Tirmidhi* Vol.1 Pg. 267.
[14] *Mishkaatul Masabeeh* Pg.362 quoting from Ahmad and *Tirmidhi*.

therefore an expression of gratitude to Allaah and a request for the safety of the child. Another possible meaning is that the safety of the child and its nurturing in a pleasing manner pivots on the sacrificing of an animal as Aqeeqah."[15]

The Philosophy and Spirit of Aqeeqah

An in-depth study of the Ahadeeth reveals that the following four factors constitute the spirit and philosophy of Aqeeqah:

1. Opposing the Jews. Whereas Aqeeqah was merely a custom for the Jews, Islaam has elevated it to the rank of being a form of Ibaadah (worship). In addition to this, Islaam has eradicated the corrupt mentality of the Jews who because of grief would not slaughter anything when a daughter was born. Islaam has encouraged slaughtering an animal to commemorate the birth of both boys and girls.

2. As understood from the statements of the Hadith commentators, Aqeeqah protects the child from calamities and difficulties.

3. Aqeeqah is a form of expressing gratitude to Allaah for the blessing of children.

4. The Aqeeqah expresses self-sacrifice because a person is telling Allaah that just as he is sacrificing the animal for Allaah's pleasure, he is prepared to sacrifice even his own life for Allaah.

Some Injunctions Pertaining to Aqeeqah

THE METHOD OF PERFORMING AQEEQAH: On the seventh day after a child is born, his/her hair should be shaved off. Thereafter, silver equal to the weight of the child's hair should be given as Sadaqah (charity). The parents may then also apply saffron water on the child's head if they wish to. The Aqeeqah should be performed after this.[16]

THE DAY OF AQEEQAH: Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها reports that Rasulullaah ρ said:

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[15] *Mirqaatul Mafaateeh* Vol.8 Pg.157.
[16] *Shaami* Vol.5 Pg.320.

و ليكن ذاك يوم السابع فان لم تكن ففي اربعة عشر فان لم تكن ففي احدي و عشرين - (هذا الحديث صحيح الاسناد)

"The Aqeeqah should be done on the 7th day. However, if this is not possible, then on the 14th day and if this is not possible, then on the 21st day."[17]

This Hadith tells us that it is best to perform the Aqeeqah on the 7th day. It is only when this is not possible that it should be performed on the 14th or 21st days. After a long while, it may become difficult to remember which day falls seven days after the birth. Therefore, Hadhrat Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi has mentioned that the day before the day of the birth would be the seventh day. Therefore, if the child was born on a Friday, every seventh day would fall on a Thursday.[18]

Injunctions Pertaining to the Meat of the Aqeeqah Animal

- Whether one distributes the meat raw or cooked, there will be no harm. Similarly, one may also use the meat to prepare a meal and invite people to partake of it.[19]

- The meat may be given to one's relatives and all of them may eat from it without any abomination.[20]

- A narration[21] of Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها states:

تقطع جدولاً ولا يكسر لها عظم

The word (جدولاً) mentioned in this Hadith refers to a limb[22]. The Hadith therefore tells us that the animal should be divided according to its limbs without the bones being cut. This is the Mustahab manner of having the animal cut. Although it is best not

[17] *I'laa us Sunan* Vol.17 Pg.94 quoting from *Haakim*.
[18] *Behisti Zewar* Vol.3 Pg.257.
[19] *Shaami* Vol.5 Pg.328.
[20] *Behisti Zewar* Vol.3 Pg.257.
[21] *I'laa us Sunan* Vol.17 Pg.94 quoting from *Haakim*.
[22] *I'laa us Sunan* Vol.17 Pg.100 quoting from *Shar'hul Muhadhab* (Vol.9 Pg.429).

to break the bones of the animal, one will not be sinful for doing so.[23]

❖ The following Hadith is narrated by Ibn Abi Shayba[24]:

ان النبي ρ بعث من عقيقة الحسن والحسين الي القابلة برجلها

This Hadith tells us that it is preferable to give the leg of the animal to the child's wet-nurse. Of course, this is not compulsory.

Miscellaneous Injunctions Pertaining to Aqeeqah

❖ It is preferable to name the child on the day of the Aqeeqah i.e. on the 7th day.[25]

❖ Animals that may be slaughtered for Qurbaani (on the day of Eidul Adhaa) may also be slaughtered for Aqeeqah.[26]

❖ Although two small animals (goats, sheep) or two parts of a large animal (cows, camels, buffaloes) should be slaughtered when a boy is born, it will also suffice to slaughter one small animal or one part of a large animal.[27]

❖ Imaam Baghawi رحمه الله states that a study of the Ahadeeth reveals that the child's hair should be shaved off after slaughtering the animal.[28]

❖ The narration of Hadhrat Umm Karz رضي الله عنها makes it clear that the animal can be either male or female.[29]

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[23] *Behisti Zewar* Vol.3 Pg.257 quoting from *Shaami* Vol.5 Pg.328.
[24] *I'laa us Sunan* Vol.17 Pg.100.
[25] *Mishkaatul Masabeeh* Pg. 362.
[26] *Shaami* Vol.5 Pg.220.
[27] *I'laa us Sunan* Vol.17 Pg.101.
[28] *I'laa us Sunan* Vol.17 Pg.104 quoting from *Shar'hul Muhadhab* (Vol.9 Pg.518).
[29] *Tirmidhi* Vol.1 Pg.278.

Some Erroneous Customs Attached to Aqeeqah

A. One of the erroneous customs some people have faith in is that the animal should be slaughtered as soon as the blade is placed on the child's head for shaving. This has no basis in the Shari'ah.

B. Some people believe that the animal's head should also be shaved after the child's. This also has no basis in the Shari'ah.

C. Although it is best to separate the limbs of the animal and not break the bones, some people wrongly believe that it is a sin to break the bones.

D. In clear contravention of the Ahadeeth, some people believe that the animal slaughtered for a boy must be male while the animal slaughtered for a girl must be female.[30]

E. Some people wrongly believe that people have to be invited for a meal when the Aqeeqah meat is cooked and that those invited should bring presents for the child and parents.

The Harms and Prohibition of Customs

It is common nowadays that people are specially invited to an Aqeeqah party. Invitation lists are drawn up, cards are printed and the house decorated to mark this occasion. In addition to this, guests are expected to bring gifts along for the child and parents. Such practises reduce the Aqeeqah from an act of Ibaadah to a baseless custom, thereby depriving the occasion of its intended spirit, philosophy and simplicity. One of the greatest harms of this is the warning sounded in the following Hadith:

ان الدين يسر و لن يشاد الدين احد الا غلبه

Hadhrat Abu Hurayra τ narrates that Rasulullaah ρ said, "Deen is certainly easy and when a person makes it difficult, it will overpower him i.e. practicing the Deen would then become difficult for the person)."[31]

[30] *Mirqaatul Mafaateeh* Vol.8 Pg.186
[31] *Bukhari* (Vol.1 Pg.10), *Fadhlul Baari* (Vol.1 Pg.452).

It is therefore clear that the worst harm of introducing customs into the Deen is that the practice in question becomes difficult.

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